

Language, Power, And Identity: A Sociolinguistic Study Of Transgender Representation In Select Indian English Autobiographies

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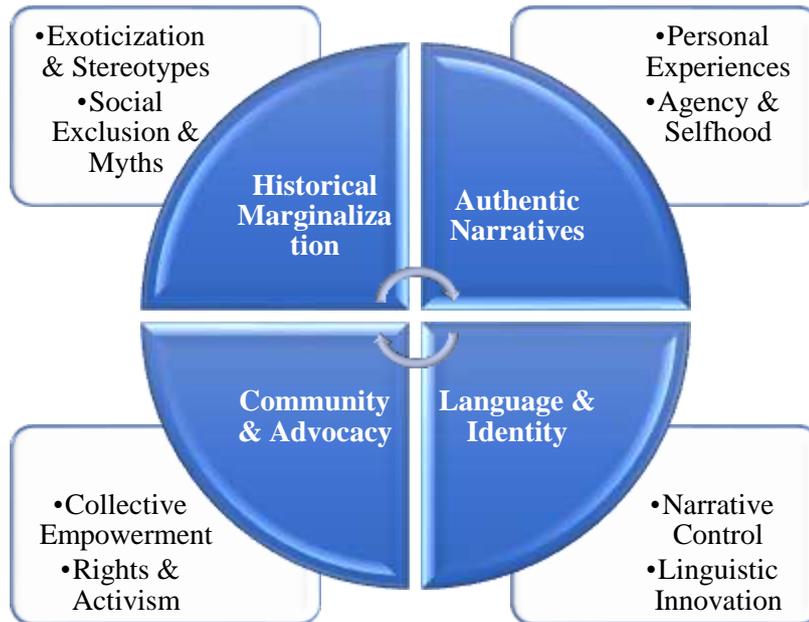
ABSTRACT

This paper examines transgender representation in Indian English autobiographical literature through a sociolinguistic lens, focusing on the interplay of language, power, and identity. By analyzing select autobiographies I Am Vidya (2013), Me Hijra, Me Laxmi (2015), The Truth About Me (2010), and We Are Not the Others (2021) the study highlights how transgender authors use language as a medium for self-representation, resistance, and community advocacy. These narratives foreground personal experiences while situating them within broader social, cultural, and regional contexts, demonstrating the performative and constitutive role of language in identity formation. The paper argues that autobiographical writing not only asserts individual agency but also fosters collective identity, challenges heteronormative discourse, and reshapes literary and sociolinguistic understanding of marginalized communities. The study underscores the need for further research on gendered language and the sociopolitical dimensions of transgender narratives in South Asia.

Keywords: Transgender Autobiography, Language and Identity, Sociolinguistics, Power and Resistance, Marginalized Communities

1. Introduction

Transgender representation in Indian literature has historically been influenced by social hierarchies and cultural perceptions that fluctuate between exoticisation, moral judgement, and marginalisation. In South Asian contexts, stories about transgender people have mostly come from outside sources, and these stories are often full of stereotypes, myths, or symbolic framing instead of real-life experiences. There has only recently been a shift toward authentic, internally grounded representation that centers selfhood and agency, thanks to the rise of transgender self-writings.

Figure 1: Evolving Representations of Transgender Identity in Indian Literature

Nair (2021) posits that early Indian literary contexts predominantly marginalised transgender individuals, denying them depth and autonomy as subjects. Instead, they were often seen as marginal figures who didn't fit into mainstream stories about identity and belonging. This small presence in literature was a sign of how transgender people were ignored and left out of society as a whole, where their lives were turned into caricatures, myths, or moral lessons.

The advent of autobiographical narratives by transgender individuals signifies a notable evolution in Indian literature. Living Smile Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2013), Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015), A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me* (2010), and Kalki Subramaniam's *We Are Not the Others* (2021) all challenge traditional literary structures by claiming narrative authority over their own life stories. These works prioritise personal experience and contest conventional gender norms, articulating a range of transgender experiences. Vidya's story is about how people in Tamil Nadu form their regional identities, Tripathi's work is about political activism and the hijra community's fight for their rights, Revathi's autobiography is about survival and community testimony, and Subramaniam's work is about collective rights-based advocacy (Nair, 2021). These self-narratives do not merely occupy a representational gap; they redefine literary discourse by foregrounding transgender identities and experiences.

Language is very important for building and communicating marginalised identities because it affects how people and groups see themselves and how others see them. For transgender writers, language serves not only as a means of expression but also as an instrument of identity construction, resistance, and social critique.

The language in transgender autobiographies is very deliberate and connected to real-life experiences. Muthukrishnan (2021) examines how Tripathi, in *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, reshapes linguistic conventions to express gender identity and community politics. Likewise, Vidya (*I Am Vidya*), Revathi (*The Truth About Me*), and Subramaniam (*We Are Not the Others*) utilise narrative voice, metaphor, and self-description to challenge simplistic classifications, affirm agency, and develop novel lexicons of identity. Vidya emphasises regional and cultural specificity in Tamil Nadu, Revathi conveys survival strategies and community testimony, and Subramaniam highlights collective advocacy and rights-based identity formation. In these stories, language is a way for transgender authors to express identities that don't fit into traditional binary categories.

Nair (2021) underscores that the act of self-writing selecting what to narrate, the manner of narration, and the linguistic forms to utilize is inherently transformative. Transgender writers reclaim representational authority, challenge dominant discourses, and reshape social imaginaries surrounding gender and identity by controlling narrative language. The autobiographies of Vidya, Tripathi, Revathi, and Subramaniam illustrate language as a battleground and a tool for the empowerment of marginalised transgender identities.

1.1 Purpose and scope of the paper

The main goal of this paper is to look at how transgender autobiographies in Indian English literature use language to build identity, deal with social power, and show agency. The study examines the relationship between linguistic choices, self-representation, and social positioning in marginalised communities through the analysis of selected autobiographical.

The paper seeks to underscore the sociolinguistic importance of transgender narratives, illustrating the dual role of language in performing and constituting individual and collective identity. It investigates strategies

including code-switching, hybrid forms, metaphor, and narrative restructuring as mechanisms for challenging prevailing heteronormative discourse and promoting visibility and empowerment.

The paper's scope includes:

1. An examination of the linguistic and narrative techniques employed in transgender autobiographies.
2. An examination of the negotiation of individual and collective identities through language.
3. Understanding the larger sociocultural, regional, and political factors that affect how transgender people are portrayed in Indian literature.
4. A conversation about what these stories mean for sociolinguistic theory, literary studies, and social activism.

This paper situates autobiographical narratives within specific frameworks, enhancing the comprehension of the interplay between language, power, and identity in marginalised communities, especially in the South Asian context.

1.2 Research Gap

Although several studies discuss transgender representation and identity struggles in literature, limited research focuses on the sociolinguistic role of language in transgender autobiographies, particularly in the Indian context. Existing research often examines individual texts rather than providing a comparative analysis of multiple autobiographies. Therefore, this study attempts to address this gap by analysing selected transgender autobiographies to understand how language functions as a tool of identity formation, empowerment, and resistance.

2. Research Methodology

Data has been collected from published books, research articles, journals, and academic sources related to transgender studies, sociolinguistics, and language and identity. A thematic and interpretative analysis is used to examine how language functions in constructing identity, expressing resistance, and representing transgender experiences.

3. Transgender Identity and Representation in Indian Society

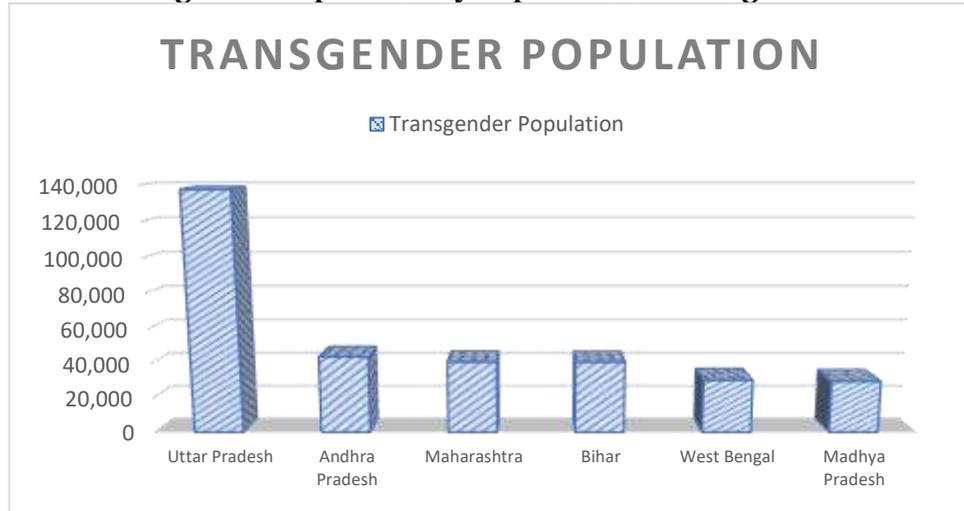
Religion, culture, and social norms have all had an impact on the long and complicated history of transgender communities in India. In the past, hijras and other gender-diverse groups were known for their ceremonial and ritualistic roles, like blessing babies and performing at weddings. This gave them both cultural visibility and spiritual authority (Sumayya, 2023). Nevertheless, historical narratives indicate that societal perceptions of transgender individuals have been contradictory – veneration coexisted with exclusion. Colonial and postcolonial legal frameworks, specifically, enforced restrictive norms and pathologised gender nonconformity, thereby diminishing the social and cultural standing of transgender communities. These historical changes led to a constant struggle between inclusion and exclusion, which has shaped how people in India today think about transgender identity.

Table 1: Population by Top States of Transgender

Source: <https://socialjustice.gov.in/common/77891>

State	Transgender Population
Uttar Pradesh	137,465
Andhra Pradesh	43,769
Maharashtra	40,891
Bihar	40,827
West Bengal	30,349
Madhya Pradesh	29,597

Figure 2: Population by Top States of Transgender



The data indicates that the transgender population in India is unevenly distributed across states. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number with 137,465 individuals, significantly more than other states, while Andhra Pradesh (43,769), Maharashtra (40,891), and Bihar (40,827) show moderately high populations. States like West Bengal (30,349) and Madhya Pradesh (29,597) have relatively smaller numbers. This variation suggests demographic, social, and possibly reporting differences across regions, highlighting the need for targeted policies and social support systems for transgender communities in high-density areas.

Even though transgender people have been a part of Indian culture and history for a long time, they have still been pushed to the edges of society and faced social stigma. Discrimination occurs in various domains, such as education, employment, healthcare, and public life, frequently perpetuated by inflexible cisnormative and heteronormative social frameworks (Sumayya, 2023). Intersectional factors, including caste, class, and regional identity, exacerbate these challenges, leading to social invisibility and restricted access to social and economic opportunities. Historically, literature has shown this marginalisation by showing transgender characters as peripheral, symbolic, or morally instructive rather than as independent people with complicated identities.

The emergence of transgender autobiographical writing signifies a pivotal intervention in literary and social discourse. Autobiographies enable transgender individuals to exercise agency, recount lived experiences, and challenge societal norms. These works offer a venue to record individual and communal challenges, contesting prevailing narratives and reshaping societal views of transgender identities. Sumayya (2023) observes that autobiographies such as A. Revathi’s *The Truth About Me* and analogous narratives enable authors to regain control over representation and emphasise experiences frequently overlooked by mainstream literature.

Language is fundamental in the formation of these marginalised identities. Transgender authors frequently alter linguistic norms to convey experiences that transcend binary gender constructs. Zimman, L. (2018) assert that gendered language in literature serves as a potent instrument for identity formation, particularly within diasporic and socially marginalised settings. In a similar vein, Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2004) contend that linguistic selections signify social status and agency, underscoring the sociolinguistic potency of narrative. In transgender autobiographies, language serves as both a vehicle for expression and a source of empowerment, enabling authors to navigate identity, counter oppression, and convey intricate social realities.

Transgender individuals can highlight their own stories while also taking part in larger social and political conversations through autobiographical writing. These texts not only record lived experiences but also serve as tools for social advocacy, emphasising issues of marginalisation, rights, and inclusion, while redefining the literary landscape for transgender voices in India (Zimman, L. (2018); Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2004)).

4. Language, Power, and Identity: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Language is not merely a means of communication; it is an essential instrument for the maintenance and contestation of social hierarchies. In India, transgender people have historically been left out of language, with public discourse and literary works reinforcing dominant, cisnormative ideas (Günay, D. (2012). Colonial and postcolonial laws and social norms enforced strict binary gender roles, marking people who didn't fit into these roles as deviant or "othered." These frameworks not only hindered social mobility but also constrained transgender individuals' capacity to articulate their experiences.

Table 2: Transgender School Enrolment by Top States

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/transgender-students-enrolment-improves-in-schools-universities-up-bihar-tops-the-list-10161050/>

State/UT	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
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Uttar Pradesh	16	239	327
Bihar	4	47	282
Rajasthan	107	88	77
West Bengal	0	211	62
All India	155	880	965

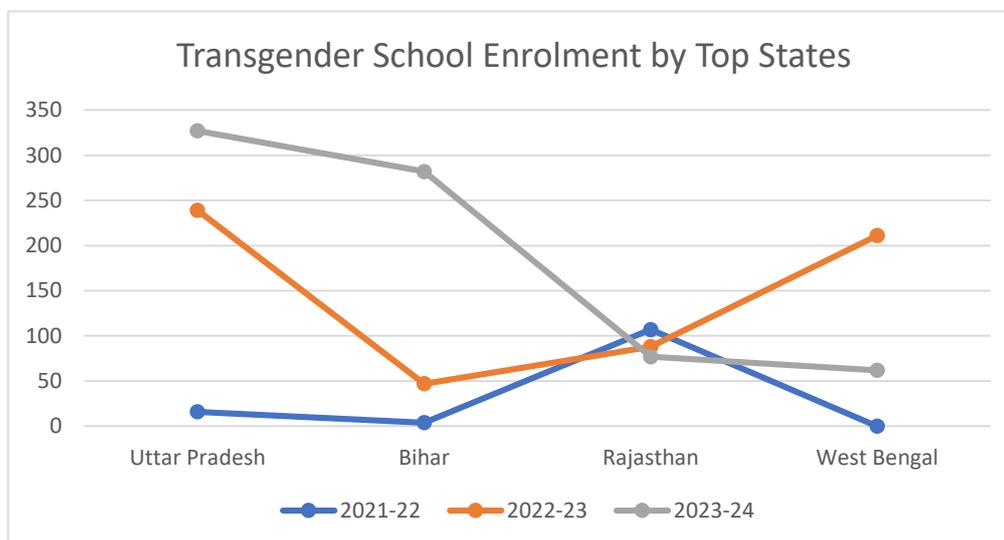


Figure 3: Transgender School Enrolment by Top States

The data shows the trend in a certain metric across selected states and all of India from 2021–22 to 2023–24. Uttar Pradesh demonstrates a consistent increase from 16 in 2021–22 to 327 in 2023–24, indicating significant growth. Bihar shows a sharp rise, especially between 2022–23 (47) and 2023–24 (282). In contrast, Rajasthan exhibits a gradual decline over the three years (107 → 77), while West Bengal shows a spike in 2022–23 (211) followed by a drop in 2023–24 (62). Overall, all-India figures reflect an upward trend from 155 to 965, suggesting nationwide growth despite state-level variations.

Language has power through what can be said, who can say it, and how identities are shown in social and literary spaces. Transgender individuals' autobiographical writings subvert existing power structures by asserting control over narrative and meaning. By expressing individual and communal experiences, these authors confront societal hierarchies, reveal systemic oppression, and challenge conventional narratives of gender (Nair, 2023). Language thus transforms into a battleground where social power, identity, and visibility converge.

For transgender authors, language serves as a means of self-definition, identity formation, and resistance. Autobiographical texts serve as a conduit for marginalised voices to navigate their personal and social identities. Writers use narrative voice, word choice, metaphor, and code-switching to show experiences that don't fit into the binary categories of gender.

For instance, in Living Smile Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2013), linguistic choices embody the confluence of regional identity, cultural affiliation, and transgender identity, demonstrating how language facilitates the process of social recognition (Dasari, T., & Reddy, G. C. (2018). Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) employs narrative techniques to emphasise political activism, community reclamation, and personal agency, illustrating the performative efficacy of language in identity formation. Through these narratives, authors contest stereotypes and express an authentic self-concept that is socially transformative (Günay, D. 2012; Nair, 2023).

In transgender autobiographies, language is performative; it does not merely depict identity but actively shapes it. Transgender writers engage in linguistic empowerment by selecting what to narrate, how to narrate it, and the forms in which stories are conveyed, thereby redefining both self-identity and societal perception.

Sociolinguistics offers an essential framework for examining how marginalised communities navigate power, identity, and social positioning via language. Marginalised discourse is shaped by the interaction of linguistic selection, social context, and systemic inequality. Transgender autobiographies provide substantial material for sociolinguistic analysis, frequently utilising strategies such as code-switching, register variation, and hybrid linguistic forms to articulate intricate experiences of gender, social status, and cultural affiliation (Dasari, T., & Reddy, G. C. 2018; Nair, 2023).

These kinds of language strategies have many uses. They assert individuality while simultaneously situating the writer within a broader community; they resist imposed social labels while validating lived experience; and they communicate nuanced social realities that might otherwise remain invisible in mainstream discourse (Günay, D. (2012). Sociolinguistic perspectives emphasise that language is inherently biased; it both mirrors

and influences power dynamics. By analysing narrative structures, lexical selections, and stylistic choices, scholars can gain insights into how marginalised voices exercise agency, oppose oppression, and reconstruct identity.

Transgender autobiographies illustrate how language functions as a tool of resistance and a means of empowerment. Authors such as Vidya, Tripathi, Revathi (*The Truth About Me*, 2010), and Kalki Subramaniam (*We Are Not the Others*, 2021) employ linguistic and narrative techniques to navigate social inclusion, formulate collective and individual identity, and contest established social hierarchies (Dasari, T., & Reddy, G. C. 2018; Nair, 2023). Language in these texts serves as a mechanism for reclaiming visibility, challenging societal norms, and creating new epistemic spaces that recognise and affirm gender plurality and diversity.

5. Transgender Autobiographical Writing in Indian English Literature

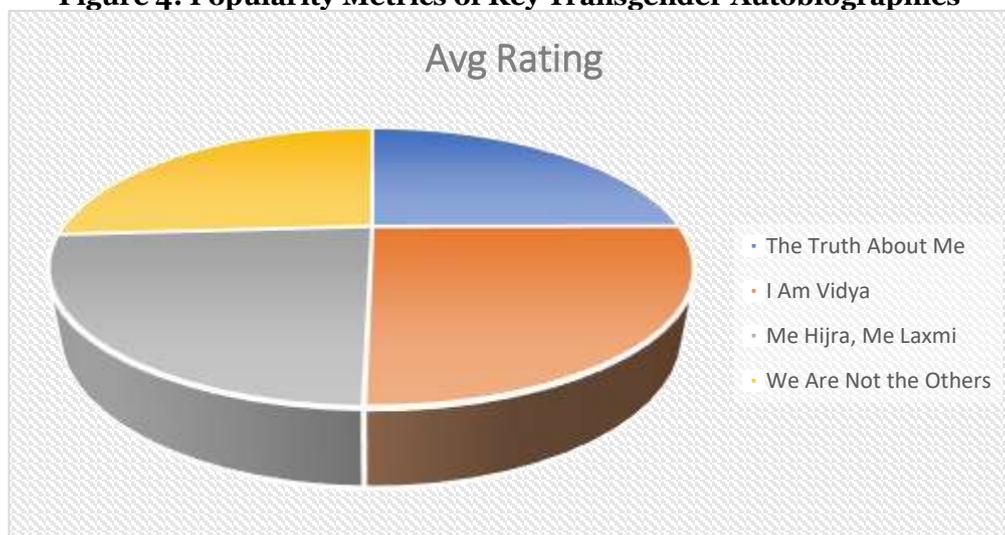
Autobiographical writing has become an important genre for transgender authors in India in recent decades. It gives them a way to tell their stories and be seen in literary and social spaces. The emergence of life writing signifies both a literary phenomenon and a social movement, as transgender individuals chronicle personal narratives, communal challenges, and identity development (Obeidat, Hammoudi, & Belkaid, 2019). Autobiographies like Living Smile Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2013), Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015), A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me* (2010), and Kalki Subramaniam's *We Are Not the Others* (2021) show how personal stories can be used for social commentary and literary engagement. These texts signify a transition from external representation to self-authored narratives that foreground transgender voices and perspectives.

Table 3: Popularity Metrics of Key Transgender Autobiographies

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/>

Title	Author	Year	Goodreads Ratings	Goodreads Reviews	Avg Rating
The Truth About Me	A. Revathi	2010	248	35	4.03
I Am Vidya	Living Smile Vidya	2013	92	14	4.10
Me Hijra, Me Laxmi	Laxmi Narayan Tripathi	2015	68	8	3.83
We Are Not the Others	Kalki Subramaniam	2021	45	6	4.20

Figure 4: Popularity Metrics of Key Transgender Autobiographies



The data on transgender autobiographies shows a range of engagement and reader appreciation. *“The Truth About Me”* by A. Revathi (2010) has the highest number of ratings (248) and reviews (35) with an average rating of 4.03, indicating broad readership and positive reception. *“I Am Vidya”* (2013) by Living Smile Vidya follows with slightly fewer ratings (92) but a comparable average rating of 4.10. *“Me Hijra, Me Laxmi”* (2015) by Laxmi Narayan Tripathi has fewer ratings (68) and reviews (8) with a lower average rating of 3.83, while *“We Are Not the Others”* (2021) by Kalki Subramaniam, though more recent and with the fewest ratings (45) and reviews (6), has the highest average rating of 4.20, suggesting strong appreciation among its readers. Overall, these works highlight both the growing visibility of transgender voices and varying levels of reader engagement over time.

Autobiography serves as both a literary genre and a mode of resistance. By narrating their personal experiences, transgender authors reassert control over narratives that have been historically influenced by stigma, marginalisation, and misrepresentation. Zimman (2017) posits that transgender language reform is intricately

linked to self-representation, demonstrating how linguistic selections in autobiographical writing contest normative discourses and provide alternative frameworks for comprehending gender. Di Martino, E. (2019) assert that the integration of trans language and identity in autobiographies functions as a form of resistance, enabling authors to reconfigure social perceptions and affirm authenticity.

In the Indian context, these autobiographies challenge societal norms by emphasising the interplay of personal, communal, and political aspects of transgender existence. Tripathi's story focuses on political activism and the hijra community's reclaiming of its identity, while Vidya's story focuses on regional identity and belonging in Tamil Nadu (Dasari, T., & Reddy, G. C. 2018). Revathi records survival and communal testimony, while Subramaniam expresses collective advocacy for rights and acknowledgement. Every text illustrates that autobiography transcends mere personal documentation; it serves as an act of social defiance, a platform where marginalised voices challenge structural inequities and normative expectations (Obeidat et al., 2019).

Transgender autobiographies hold significant social importance. They function as tools for cultural education, advocacy, and awareness-raising, shedding light on matters of discrimination, social exclusion, and identity negotiation. Language in these texts serves as a conduit between the individual and society, illustrating the construction and contestation of identity within social discourse (Khan, Sultana, Bughio, & Naz, 2014). Autobiographies, by emphasising first-person experience, contest stereotypes, humanise marginalised communities, and offer readers nuanced perspectives on the lived experiences of transgender individuals.

Furthermore, personal narratives in Indian English literature serve a dual function: they chronicle individual micro-level experiences while engaging in macro-level social critique. They elucidate the intricacies of gender identity, traverse the conflict between societal norms and individual authenticity, and promote inclusion and acknowledgement in modern society (Zimman, 2017; Di Martino, E. 2019). These texts demonstrate that autobiographical writing is not merely literary but profoundly sociopolitical, connecting individual experience with collective struggle and public consciousness.

The emergence of transgender autobiographical writing in Indian English literature represents a pivotal shift in both literary and societal contexts. By focusing on self-written stories, transgender writers fight against being pushed to the edges, question standard language structures, and take control of how they show their identity. Autobiographies such as *I Am Vidya*, *Me Hijra*, *Me Laxmi*, *The Truth About Me*, and *We Are Not the Others* illustrate that personal narrative serves as both a mode of literary expression and a catalyst for social change, emphasising the inextricable connection between language, power, and identity in the formation of marginalised subjectivities.

6. Negotiating Identity through Language in Select Autobiographies

Transgender autobiographies in Indian English literature exemplify the deliberate manipulation of language to convey intricate gender identities. Authors utilise various linguistic strategies, including code-switching, narrative restructuring, metaphor, and register variation, to articulate experiences that transcend conventional binary frameworks (Koc, D. K. 2022; Jørgensen, 2016). These strategies enable writers to regulate the representation of their identities, fostering environments for genuine self-expression. For instance, Tamil and English are mixed in Living Smile Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2013) to show both regional identity and gendered selfhood. In Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015), narrative voice and descriptive language are used to show community-based activism and personal change. These kinds of language changes show how gender identity can change and go against traditional language rules.

Language in transgender autobiographies serves as a medium for articulating lived experiences, adversities, and societal challenges. Through first-person narration and reflective discourse, authors convey both personal and communal realities, elucidating the social and cultural obstacles encountered by transgender individuals (Ergasheva, G. I. Q., & Narbutayeva, Z. M. 2023). Revathi's *The Truth About Me* (2010) exemplifies this methodology, delineating survival strategies and systemic obstacles while articulating the collective experience of the hijra community. Kalki Subramaniam's *We Are Not the Others* (2021) likewise employs narrative and linguistic framing to emphasise social advocacy and collective resilience. These linguistic selections not only record experiences but also express defiance against societal marginalisation and create interpretive frameworks that allow readers to connect with transgender lived experiences.

Autobiographical language empowers transgender writers to affirm their identity, dignity, and autonomy. By meticulously constructing narrative structure, tone, and lexical selection, authors reassert narrative authority over lives that have been historically misrepresented or marginalised (Jørgensen, 2016; Di Martino, E., & von Flotow, L. (2019)). The intentional use of language serves both performative and representational purposes, establishing the writer as an active participant in the construction of identity discourse. Vidya, Tripathi, Revathi, and Subramaniam exemplify how self-authored narratives contest societal stereotypes, honour resilience, and uphold dignity, illustrating that language is integral to the mechanisms of empowerment and identity formation.

Transgender autobiographies utilise linguistic strategies to convert personal experiences into potent assertions of agency, thereby fostering social awareness, advocacy, and the cultural recontextualization of gender norms. Ergasheva, G. I. Q., & Narbutayeva, Z. M. (2023) contend that multilingual and hybridised linguistic practices within South Asian communities function not only to navigate social status but also to assert recognition, underscoring the interconnectedness of language, identity, and power.

Table 4: Linguistic Strategies and Identity Negotiation in Select Indian English Transgender Autobiographies

Title	Author	Year	Linguistic Strategies	Thematic Focus	Purpose / Identity Negotiation
<i>The Truth About Me</i>	A. Revathi	2010	First-person narration, reflective discourse, descriptive language	Survival, systemic obstacles, collective hijra experience	Articulates communal realities, challenges marginalisation, asserts agency
<i>I Am Vidya</i>	Living Smile Vidya	2013	Code-switching (Tamil–English), narrative restructuring	Regional identity, gendered selfhood	Blends local and gender identity, affirms selfhood
<i>Me Hijra, Me Laxmi</i>	Laxmi Narayan Tripathi	2015	Narrative voice variation, metaphor, descriptive lexicon	Community activism, personal transformation	Connects personal and communal identity, challenges norms
<i>We Are Not the Others</i>	Kalki Subramaniam	2021	Narrative framing, linguistic emphasis on advocacy	Social advocacy, collective resilience	Highlights empowerment, cultural dialogue, social visibility

In certain Indian English transgender autobiographies, language functions as both an instrument and a conduit for negotiating identity, depicting struggles, and affirming selfhood. Through strategic linguistic practices, these authors express gender identity, share lived experiences, and assert control over social representation. Autobiographical writing thus becomes a place where language, power, and identity come together, leading to empowerment, visibility, and cultural dialogue.

7. Language and Power Structures in Transgender Narratives

Language serves as both a mirror of societal power and an instrument for challenging it. In transgender narratives, linguistic strategies are intentionally utilised to challenge prevailing social norms that restrict gender identity. In India, transgender voices have historically been marginalised or misrepresented in literature, media, and public discourse, frequently characterised as “deviant,” “othered,” or “symbolic” instead of as autonomous individuals (Kelien, Karjo, & Binus University, 2023a). Autobiographical writing enables transgender individuals to reclaim narrative authority, employing language to assert dominance over the representation of their identities.

Writers use things like non-binary pronouns, hybrid language forms, changing the structure of the story, and creative word choices to go against the rules. For example, Living Smile Vidya’s *I Am Vidya* (2013) mixes Tamil and English, which shows how regional identity and gendered selfhood can come together. In the same way, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi’s *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) uses descriptive, reflective, and activist language to tell the stories of both individuals and groups, fighting against cultural stereotypes and making their voices heard. These linguistic practices underscore the performative aspect of language as a conduit for marginalised individuals to navigate recognition and authority within society (Yang, 2023).

Transgender autobiographies challenge heteronormative and cisnormative discourse by emphasising experiences beyond the binary gender framework. By emphasising the conflicts between individual experience and societal norms, these texts elucidate the influence of prevailing narratives on cultural, legal, and social interpretations of gender (Kelien, Karjo, & Binus University, 2023b).

Autobiographical works such as Vidya’s *I Am Vidya* and Tripathi’s *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* challenge heteronormative assumptions through both narrative content and linguistic style and structure. Writers use first-person points of view, reflective commentary, and non-linear storytelling to break up traditional narrative forms and put transgender subjectivity at the center of the literary text. Kalki Subramaniam’s *We Are Not the Others* (2021) intensifies this challenge by amalgamating individual and collective narratives, underscoring rights-based advocacy, communal solidarity, and opposition to marginalisation. By challenging prevailing narratives, these stories broaden the scope for depicting gender diversity and social inclusion in literature and societal awareness (Yang, 2023).

Autobiographical narratives furnish transgender authors with the means to assert their voice, agency, and empowerment. By deliberately crafting language, narrative structure, and stylistic elements, authors reassert control over their life narratives and confront the historical marginalisation of transgender experiences. Code-switching, metaphorical framing, and reflective narration fulfil both expressive and strategic functions, enabling authors to navigate identity, articulate challenges, and assert individual and collective agency (Kelien, Karjo, & Binus University, 2023a; Yang, 2023).

A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me* (2010) chronicles survival strategies and community histories, while concurrently affirming individual dignity and societal value. Tripathi's autobiography emphasises political activism and community advocacy, illustrating how language can serve as both personal expression and social intervention. Vidya stresses the importance of regional identity and belonging. She does this by using linguistic hybridity to connect cultural and gendered selfhood. These strategies make language a tool for empowerment by turning private experiences into public stories that question social hierarchies and call for recognition, rights, and inclusion.

Along with print autobiographies, transgender representation in digital culture has made language even more important in figuring out who you are. Research demonstrates that online platforms enable transgender individuals to explore language, gendered expressions, and self-representation through interactive and performative methods (Kelien, Karjo, & Binus University, 2023a, 2023b). Digital linguistic practices, including the formulation of non-binary pronouns, innovative orthography, and multimodal narrative structures, reflect and enhance techniques present in autobiographical writing. These spaces offer avenues for resistance, advocacy, and community development, demonstrating that language as a means of empowerment transcends literary contexts into quotidian social and digital exchanges.

By looking at both autobiographical and digital stories, it becomes clear that language is always linked to power. Transgender individuals assert authority over representation, challenge dominant norms, and create epistemic spaces for the recognition and validation of their identities through the strategic deployment of linguistic features.

Transgender narratives demonstrate that language is profoundly interconnected with power, identity, and social agency. Autobiographical and digital texts illustrate how marginalised communities utilise language strategically to resist normative constraints, contest heteronormative discourses, and assert both personal and collective authority. Transgender writers utilise narrative structure, lexical innovation, and sociolinguistic techniques to convert language into a vehicle for empowerment, social critique, and identity formation. These narratives underscore the dual function of language: as an instrument of oppression when governed by prevailing norms, and as a vehicle for resistance, representation, and the validation of identity (Kelien et al., 2023a, 2023b; Yang, 2023).

8. Representation of Community and Collective Identity

In Indian English literature, transgender autobiographies often go beyond telling one person's story to show the lives, histories, and social structures of hijra and transgender communities. These texts show how personal identity and belonging to a group are connected, and how social norms, regional contexts, and cultural practices affect transgender people's lives. Living Smile Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2013) situates personal identity within a Tamil Nadu perspective, illustrating how regional culture and social environment shape selfhood and community affiliation. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) also focuses on the hijra community's political activism and cultural reclamation, stressing how important it is for people to have a shared identity.

Autobiographical narratives offer a perspective to perceive the transgender community not solely as a collection of individuals but as a socially and culturally unified entity. By recording rituals, community structures, and common struggles, these texts safeguard collective memory and validate the authenticity of transgender social spaces (Zimman, 2019).

A key aspect of transgender autobiographies is the focus on unity and common experiences. Narratives frequently emphasise the role of community networks in offering emotional, social, and material assistance amid marginalisation and systemic discrimination. A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me* (2010) exemplifies this by chronicling survival strategies and communal testimonies, illustrating how hijra communities operate as networks of mutual aid and resilience. Kalki Subramaniam's *We Are Not the Others* (2021) also focuses on collective advocacy for rights, showing how shared experiences of being on the outside can lead to social mobilisation and identity assertion.

These depictions of community underscore the interrelation between personal identity and communal affiliation. They demonstrate that empowerment frequently arises not solely from self-representation but also from the acknowledgement of collective social and cultural narratives (Di Martino, E., & von Flotow, L. 2019). Autobiographical narratives are essential in forming and solidifying collective identity. These texts create a sense of shared memory and social cohesion by putting individual experiences next to communal histories. Writers like Vidya, Tripathi, Revathi, and Subramaniam use language to talk about the struggles of many people, explain social norms, and fight for rights. This creates a story of community identity that goes beyond individual experience.

Zimman (2019) observes that self-identification in narrative forms serves as a mediator of the tension between individual agency and social belonging. Autobiographies serve as venues for the assertion, validation, and performance of collective identity, merging individual voice with communal representation. Through these stories, marginalised groups work to get recognition in larger social and cultural conversations. This shows that language can be both a tool for individual empowerment and a way to make a group visible.

Table 5: Representation of community and collective identity

Title	Author	Year	Community Focus	Collective Themes	Key Strategies / Narrative Insights
<i>The Truth About Me</i>	A. Revathi	2010	Hijra community networks	Survival strategies, mutual aid, communal resilience	Chronicles communal testimonies; highlights emotional, social, and material support systems
<i>I Am Vidya</i>	Living Smile Vidya	2013	Tamil Nadu transgender community	Regional culture shaping identity, social belonging	Mixes Tamil and English; situates personal identity within regional and communal context
<i>Me Hijra, Me Laxmi</i>	Laxmi Narayan Tripathi	2015	Hijra community activism	Political advocacy, cultural reclamation, shared struggles	Uses narrative voice variation and descriptive language to reflect collective empowerment
<i>We Are Not the Others</i>	Kalki Subramaniam	2021	Broader transgender communities	Rights advocacy, social mobilisation, collective visibility	Employs narrative framing emphasizing social advocacy; links individual experiences to communal identity

Transgender autobiographies underscore the interconnection of individual and collective identity. These narratives offer a nuanced comprehension of how personal experiences are situated within collective contexts by chronicling community life, shared adversities, and social cohesion. The books *I Am Vidya*, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, *The Truth About Me*, and *We Are Not the Others* show that claiming one's identity is also claiming one's community. This shows how language and stories can help people feel connected, recognised, and empowered (Zimman, 2019; Di Martino, E., & von Flotow, L. 2019).

9. Discussion

The autobiographies offer deep insights into transgender identity in Indian English literature, revolving around three main themes: identity negotiation, resistance to marginalisation, and community solidarity.

1. **Identity Negotiation:** These texts highlight the fluidity of transgender identity, situating personal experiences within broader socio-cultural and regional frameworks. Vidya illustrates the interplay between Tamil Nadu's regional identity and transgender selfhood, while Tripathi places personal identity within the hijra community's political and cultural history, showing gender as both personal and socially constructed (Koç, D. K. 2022; Zimman, 2019).

2. **Resistance to Marginalisation:** Autobiographies function as acts of resistance, challenging historical and ongoing exclusion. Non-linear narratives, hybrid linguistic forms, and reflective voices enable authors to assert autonomy and contest heteronormative norms (Kelien, Karjo, & Binus University, 2023a; Nair, 2023). Life writing thus becomes a performative intervention in social structures.

3. **Community Solidarity:** These works stress communal support, resilience, and collective advocacy. Revathi and Subramaniam emphasise that empowerment arises not only from individual agency but also from shared experiences and social mobilisation (Di Martino, E., & von Flotow, L. 2019; Zimman, 2019).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, language is central to identity and power. Authors employ code-switching, metaphor, non-binary pronouns, and narrative voice to articulate non-traditional gender identities (Jørgensen, 2016; Koç, D. K. 2022). Linguistic practices deconstruct heteronormative discourse and forge alternative frameworks for understanding gender (Yang, 2023; Kelien, Karjo, & Binus University, 2023b). They also convey communal histories and collective advocacy, linking personal empowerment with social intervention.

Overall, these autobiographies demonstrate that transgender identity is relational, performative, and socially situated. Through language, narrative, and community, authors resist marginalisation, assert agency, and foster collective solidarity, making their life writing both a literary and sociopolitical practice that reshapes perceptions of gender diversity in India.

10. Conclusion

Transgender autobiographies in Indian English literature provide a distinctive perspective to examine the confluence of language, identity, and power. The chosen texts *I Am Vidya*, *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi*, *The Truth About Me*, and *We Are Not the Others* emphasize the complex nature of transgender experiences, demonstrating the profound interconnection between personal narratives and social, cultural, and regional contexts. These autobiographies illustrate that transgender identity is both personally negotiated and socially

contextualised, and that the expression of selfhood frequently entails resisting societal marginalisation and asserting agency.

Language becomes a pivotal instrument in these narratives, serving as a conduit for articulating gender identity, contesting heteronormative discourse, and fostering empowerment. Authors can talk about their lived experiences, negotiate social visibility, and take control of representation through linguistic strategies like code-switching, hybrid forms, reflective narration, and non-linear storytelling. Moreover, the autobiographies underscore the significance of community, chronicling shared adversities, collective unity, and the restoration of cultural and social identity.

These autobiographies make important contributions to both sociolinguistic and literary studies. They broaden the literary canon by highlighting marginalised voices and illustrating how self-authored narratives can challenge conventional gender representations. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, they elucidate the role of language in identity construction, power dynamics, and social acknowledgement. Transgender autobiographies document the interplay between language, social structures, and personal agency, serving as both empirical and theoretical resources for comprehending the role of language in the construction, negotiation, and assertion of marginalised identities.

Although these texts offer essential insights, additional research on gendered language is necessary, especially within South Asian and Indian transgender communities. Research may investigate regional linguistic variations, digital and social media language practices, and comparative analyses of multilingual or diasporic transgender narratives. Research could also examine how intersectional factors such as caste, class, religion, and disability interact with language to influence identity and social positioning. Broadening this scholarship would deepen comprehension of marginalised perspectives and enrich overarching discussions regarding social justice, inclusivity, and cultural representation.

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